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An Investigation of English Reading Comprehension Text Difficulties among Master Level Saudi Students

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Abstract:

The purpose of this research was to explore the English reading comprehension text difficulties among master level Saudi students to support the reading comprehension of students with reading difficulties. The literature is mixed in regard to the different difficulties students have in reading comprehension. The Research examined the specific problems faced by these students in the literature. A survey study was conducted. 120 master level students were the participants, with reading difficulties who participated in this study. Convenience sampling was used. The findings showed that the highest difficulties faced by Saudi students on reading comprehension text were vocabulary, reading speed and the less difficult problems faced by Saudi students on reading comprehension text was reading aloud by the students. However, it was recommended that the publishers should introduce supplements or bilingual glossaries, and there should be matching text with the learning material. Further, any planned reading aloud by the instructors for these master level students can produce good text comprehension. Nevertheless; linguistics and lexical knowledge were also recommended for these master level students.

Keywords: Reading comprehension, text difficulties, vocabulary, reading speed and reading aloud

1. Introduction

In the age of information and internet revolution, reading retains its significance as an essential skill for learners of any language. For most of them, it is an essential skill to master to assure success in learning. Reading as referred by Koda (2007) is a process, and its goal is to build the meaning of the text based on visually encoded data. However, reading is also a composite cognitive task. Ovando (2005) stated that reading in the first language enables readers to use only a single language whereas, in a second language, learners have at least two languages to manage. As an outcome, reading a text in a foreign or second language with comprehension becomes much complex, more laborious and sophisticated method. Pugh et al. (2000) stated that reading is regarded to be an essential skill for survival in life and as such a fundamental skill for the success of academics. Moreover, with the social media expansion and interconnectedness of foreign, mastering sufficient reading comprehension level in English is becoming more important. There has been a continual reduction in the average ability of reading of college-aged students.

2. Literature Review

Jubani et al. (2012) mentioned that reading is the key to learning. Knowledge and learning are basis to education. The reading history is related to the invention of writing. It is the similar knowledge that no one is born knowing how to write or read because these two things must be taught. Reading is of huge importance in human life. Therefore, it is the major factor in the acquisition of knowledge and expertise. Reading is a translation of spoken words and written symbols and the relationship between the meaning and written symbol. Al-jarf (2007) stated that the main objective of teaching reading is to manage readers to read to acquire the information and perceive what has been read efficiently. This is known as reading comprehension. Reading comprehension means the capability to read the text and discern the intent of the writer. It includes using prior knowledge making predictions and drawing out valuable information among other factors. There are various reading ways to develop comprehension such as reading silently or aloud.

McNamara (2007) stated that Saudi Arabia is a small country with only 20 million people. The educators of Saudi Arabia examined that something is worrying the teachers, and there are many students who do not prefer to read books. This has a negative influence on academic achievement and improvement of students. Walczyk and Griffith Ross (2007) provided a theory on developing comprehension involving the skills of reading. This theory focuses on skills of reading and grabbing the attention of readers to build reading with weak readers. Vacca (2002) stated that reading comprehension is the essential skill which a child learns. Learning to be a systematic, strategic and active reader is critical for success in all areas of content. The learning of literacy that takes place in adolescents between the ages of 10 and 18 is of crucial significance in preparing for life in and out of school. The reading skill excellence with understanding is one of the significant vital skills to obtain knowledge

and prosper as a learner. Several learners may never handle to read well. Hence, they face specific reading issues owing to weakened confidence in their own ability.

The skill of reading in students can be regarded as the most essential skill in Saudi Arabia and is of most importance. The curriculum of English courses in Saudi Arabia emphasizes reading as the major skill to be developed by learners from intermediate to graduate level and in preparatory year courses as well. The most essential issue faced by instructors nowadays is the deficiency in reading and issue in comprehension among the students in university level at Arab nations. Many students could be accounted well for as disabled judging by their difficulties in reading an issue which may reflect in bad performance in their activities of education. Reading can be regarded as one of the usual ways of obtaining information in the social and academic settings specifically. It may be regarded that the individual who is not capable of reading well will face severe issues particularly in what is considered to be educational and consequently opportunities of the job.

Gray (2010) mentioned that in Saudi Arabia, the elementary schools use standardized basic readers to teach reading to entire students in 1st to 6th grade. In 1st to 3rd grade, the students learn to read, and in 4th to 6th grade, they read for comprehension. The program of reading in elementary schools in Saudi Arabia emphasizes vocabulary acquisition, word recognition, and comprehension. Most of the elementary school students in Saudi Arabia are not better readers. This has a negative influence on the academic accomplishment of students. Zhao (2009) mentioned that in Saudi Arabia, teachers make use of varied strategies of reading to develop the comprehension of students. It is important to suggest that teachers are exceptional when it comes to teaching about the strategies of reading. The teachers described the fact that they did not prepare students how to set up the regular reading exercises purpose. It is also important to mention that students were not a rivalry when it comes to making queries concerning different texts in a consistent way. Brown (2001) indicated that the strategy of assessing the process of comprehension was taught to students of Saudi Arabia; however, the strategies of perception are important when it comes to developing the methods of reading. The competency of reading enhances one to face the process of constructing and understanding the meaning of a text piece. Therefore, the development of reading skill among learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) is an overriding and primary goal in the pedagogy of English language in Saudi Arabia.

Imperfect knowledge of the vocabulary of English is one of the major difficulty causes in comprehension. Both comprehension and reading are major elements when it comes to learning English among students in Saudi Arabia. English has indeed obtained an important status as a foreign language in Saudi Arabia. The most spoken language of technology, research, and business as well as behind the driving force and factor for transfer of knowledge, English is vastly considered as a factor for global communication, and its acquisition is understood as compulsory. Several parents in Arab are keen on having the education of English for their children which they firmly believe is the need to social and professional success because several well-paid jobs, opportunities and greater positions for promotion around the globe and mainly in the region of Gulf are related with better English proficiency. In the Saudi Arabia Kingdom, a job applicant who is skilled in English is much probable to acquire positions in government or private sector firms than other applicants with no or weak English command. This is why several nonspeaking English nations around the globe involving the Gulf nations enhance the proficiency of English as a foreign language as a part of their effort towards the accomplishment of internationalization and modernization. Al Turka and Dufuaa (2003) have stated that college students also come to college with deficits in reading in Saudi Arabia. They always arrive to colleges who are not able to read for details, recognize major notions or identify the relationship among text elements. With the developed requirement for college graduates from English department to become skilled English teachers, it is essential to assess their comprehension reading.

In Saudi Arabia, there have been many issues regarding college graduates who lack significant skills. With the lack of national measures, several calls for recognizing measures of proficiency have been provided. Krieger (2007) has mentioned that the main aim is to have students reading at her or his own grade level or above it. As an outcome, many teachers need to support these students, but they are not sure how to support on what the best strategies are that can support the students to become better readers. Reading has numerous advantages for students because it can develop social skills of students and open up new worlds for them. The students must view reading as an enjoyable activity to indeed advantage from it not only associated with school or university. Thus, it can be inferred that reading is beneficial for all students to study the subjects and have strong skills to struggling in their lives of academics.

To succeed academically, one of the foundational skills is the reading skill, and it is considered to be an essential skill for survival (Dearman and Davis, 1990; Pugh, Pawan, and Antommarchi, 2000). Current studies reveal a continuous decline in the average reading skills of young adults who are students. There is a risk of less achievement in academics in three out of four students. There was an assessment conducted at the Saudi Arabia Qassim University of the English reading comprehension for senior students who chose English as their major subject. The investigation focused on the GPAs of the reading ability and the impending impacts of the age of the students. A quantitative method was used in this study, and about one hundred and three participants were involved in the investigation. There were two reading comprehensions on different topics and lengths of contents, and each understanding has ten multiple questions. The findings of this study show that there was a low capability of reading comprehension on the whole and the significant factor, GPA significantly impacted the participants reading comprehension. It was also found that the student's age was irrelevant to their reading ability and the reading materials prescribed focused on the reading strategies instead of comprehension instructions as the whole concept of

comprehension loses its meaning while decoding and reading are done without understanding the comprehension (Abik, 2014).

Ebad (2014) has stated that around the world at higher education institutions EMI (English as a medium of instruction) dominates. In the Saudi Arabian Kingdom, the adoption of English as a medium of instruction in entire universities is compulsory by Higher Education Ministry. Javid et al. (2012) have stated that all students who graduate from secondary schools in Saudi and who are admitted to universities must record in a PYP (preparatory year program) where they are expected to accomplish some English proficiency level before they are accepted into UG degree programs. Because the concerns considering the levels of reduced efficiency in English amongst the students are developing and some Saudi Arabian universities have been performing to resolve the problem by continuously changing and evolving English as a foreign language instructional and pedagogical practices. Out of the four significant skills of English as a foreign language taught at tertiary level institutions in Saudi Arabia developing a reading habit among students seems to be challenging and problematic. The studies of Al-Nujaidi (2003) and Abik (2014) predicted poor proof of poor comprehension of reading amongst high school students in Saudi Arabia entering university. However, Al-Akloby (2001) conducted a study in Saudi Arabia inferred that English as a foreign language learner in Saudi Arabia has a positive attitude towards acquiring and learning reading English as a foreign language material as well as English. Similarly, the study of Al-Mansour and Al-Shorman (2011) showed that with the positive and proper approach of pedagogy the English as foreign language learners in Saudi Arabia had become much encouraged towards L2 reading. Reading is significant to facilitate students increase access to numerous diverse kinds of information, knowledge, thoughts, and ideas.

Despite the fact that much research (Alhaidari, 2006; Al-Musallam, 2009) has been conducted on how to encourage reading among English as a foreign language learner in Saudi Arabia, the primary focus of these studies has been the views of teachers and what they perceive as successful methods to encourage their learners. Al-Hamound and Schmitt (2009) mentioned that reading required to be repackaged as a way to learn new things and as an activity of entertaining rather than a way to pass an exam or to practice the skills of English or merely to develop scholastically. Those who refer themselves as non-readers must be motivated to view that linking with the written word in all its forms is part of what is to be a reader. If Gibson (2008) is correct in considering that oral reading can be made the much capable device of learning with larger systematization in the curriculum the methods by which the teachers in Saudi Arabia motivate and use oral reading in the classroom must be researched further. It is feasible that scholastic surroundings in Saudi Arabia offer an ideal setting for permitting the methods of oral reading to assist essential gains in reading comprehension. This setting of education coupled with an appreciation of culture for memorization and oral religious traditions through recitation orally could enhance powerful tendencies among students to relate oral reading with memorization and concentration.

Adequate knowledge of English vocabulary is a must for those who learn English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Proficiency in skimming, scanning, reading speed which is the rate of reading and power of understanding are equally essential. The EFL students of Saudi Arabia are deficient in proficiency in finding the meaning in a given context and summarizing the general picture of the comprehension passage. There are two ways of doing the reading comprehension – an intensive way for juniors and the extensive way. In the view of the researcher, the extensive way having some aspects of intensive way of teaching such as a precise computer-assisted application is more productive for students. It is directly connected with the classroom instruction. Showcasing the importance of reading comprehension and the problems faced by the Saudi students was the main focus area of the research. In conclusion, the complexities are seen in many areas such as exercising vocabulary, skimming, scanning, predicting and summarizing during understanding the English reading text in Najran University (Nezami, 2012)

In a study, Alshumaimeri (2005) explored the relative outcomes of various reading techniques on the performance of comprehension of the Saudi EFL male students of 10th grade. The score of these students who were asked to read three similar passages in three different ways (silent, oral and subvocalizing) was evaluated. The outcomes showed a vast difference between sub vocalization and oral reading and silent reading and oral reading. It was concluded that the most significant effect on the performance of comprehension was of oral reading among the other three methods, and it was the most preferred reading methods for almost all the groups involved in the study. Most of the respondents reported that the oral reading was best preferred over any other reading methods besides being the style best-supporting understanding. From the feedback of the study, it is clear that the oral reading is given preference as it supports memorizing the texts and words, practicing words, pronunciation and concentration while encountering new and real-world situations. However, the author recommended the language teachers to identify the best method of reading by making use of all available means of reading.

It was examined that the language and cognitive report in children having poor reading ability using a longitudinal outlook. Although understanding skills are closely linked to educational accomplishment, the deficits in comprehension in children were ignored in the research of reading. The comprehension factors behind the power of reading are vital as it advances the potential of the early recognition of children at the peril of budding reading problems. The three studies were involved in the research and examined 1000 twin pairs of ages between 5 and 15 years using well-identified predictors of reading, spelling, decoding, understanding comprehension and oral language procedures. The theoretical framework used in the study was the Simple View of Reading and children who showed different types of understanding - related intricacies were identified at different ages. In both, the prospective and retrospective analysis, the results indicated a definite oral language shortfall in all subtypes along with understanding problems. This shortfall of oral language was widespread and included

grammar, vocabulary, and verbal memory. Further, the oral language shortfall was evident as the phonological responsiveness was compromised preceding the teaching of the reading skill. Reading comprehension discrepancies were budding across investigations in children with reading text and understanding difficulties (Elwer, 2014).

3. Problem Statement

There has been a continual decrease in the reading ability of university students with nearly one-third of master level students regarded at risk for reduced academic achievement. Reading is essential to support students to acquire access to several types of information, ideas, and knowledge. It is a general assumption that reading skill is one of the simplest of the four skills that is speaking, writing, listening and reading for the university students and beginner. Reading for EFL learners needs adequate knowledge in vocabulary, adeptness in skimming and scanning skills, comprehension power and reading speed. The reading comprehension determines the reading skill level of students, estimates the present pedagogical strategies adopted by universities and proposes strategies to further develop the reading skills among Saudi Arabian English readers. This study discusses the reading text level difficulties of Saudi master level students.

4. Research Questions:

The research questions of this study are:

- Do Saudi students' have difficulties on reading comprehension text?
- What are the highest difficulties faced by Saudi students on reading comprehension text?
- What are the less difficult problems faced by Saudi students on reading comprehension text?
- What are the suitable suggestions for these master level Saudi students' text reading comprehension difficulties?

5. Ethical considerations

There must be some essential morals to be followed in any exploration. Morals in this study were kept up by the researcher by keeping the reactions got entirely classified. Also, an earlier authorization was taken by the investigator from the target sample unit.

6. Methodology

Research is a coherent and deliberate quest for new and helpful data on a specific point. The accompanying part discusses exploration paradigm, examination configuration, sorts of information, sampling outline, information investigation, accumulation and understanding procedures adjusted in this examination notwithstanding clarify moral contemplation and impediments included in this exploration. According to Fowler Jr (2013) Survey Research Methods presents the very latest methodological knowledge on surveys by offering a sound basis for evaluating how each aspect of a survey can affect its precision, accuracy, and credibility. Hence, a survey questionnaire was used in this study as it facilitated the answers of all research questions mentioned above.

6.1. Sampling

Unlike probability samples, with a convenience sample, the selection cost is minimal, just because the sample is selected by just that, convenience. For a convenience sample, the determination of representativeness is much more subjective (Ferber, 1977). It was easy for the research involving the selection of the most accessible subjects and that was an element of convenience sampling in this study with ease of excess. As the researcher was working in the College of Applied Medical Sciences, King Saud Bin Abdul Aziz University for Health Sciences at Al Hasa campus as English language lecture and found it easy to collect data from English Language Centre of King Faisal University which was in the same city. Thus, this is a more thoughtful approach to the selection of a sample is usually the justification of this type of sampling in this study. The investigation was majorly targeted on the difficulties faced by the master level students of ELC of the King Faisal University in Saudi Arabia. The sample size selection was based on the formula:

$$n = \frac{(Z_{\alpha/2})^2 \hat{p} \hat{q}}{e^2} P = 0.5$$

E = 95% confidence level

6.2. Data Analysis & Findings

The investigation followed a survey approach, and the quantitative data were collected from 120 students within a semester of 4 months. SPSS v 20.0 was used for data analyses. Reliability analysis showed the Cronbach's alpha, α (.773) which was acceptable reliability for the questionnaire. However, multipleresponses for an overall percentage of each variable as shown in table 1. The answer to the first research question that these master level Saudi students' have difficulties on reading comprehension text was 21.9% which showed a meager reading comprehension with the text. While the readability Statistics showed Flesch Reading Ease was 24.4 and Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level of the academic material was 13.3 as shown below in figure 1.

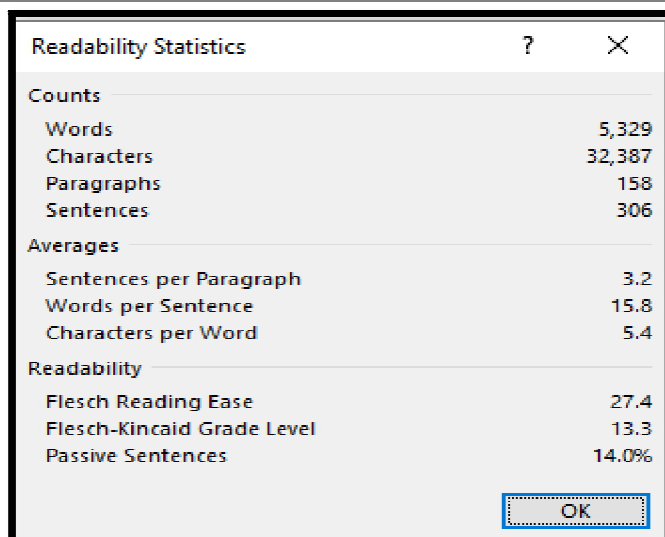


Figure 1

On the other side, answer to the second research question that the highest difficulties faced by Saudi students on the reading comprehension text were vocabulary and reading speed which was 29.0% and 28.5% positively as given in table 1 below.

Reading Problems with English Text Frequencies				
		Responses		
		N	Percent	
	Comprehension problem	120	21.9%	
	Reading aloud Problem	120	20.6%	
	Speed	120	28.5%	
	Vocabulary Problem	120	29.0%	
Total			100.0%	

Table 1

Further, the answer to the third research question about the less difficult reasons faced by Saudi students on reading comprehension text was reading aloud by the students which were the lowest one 20.6% as shown below in Figure 2.

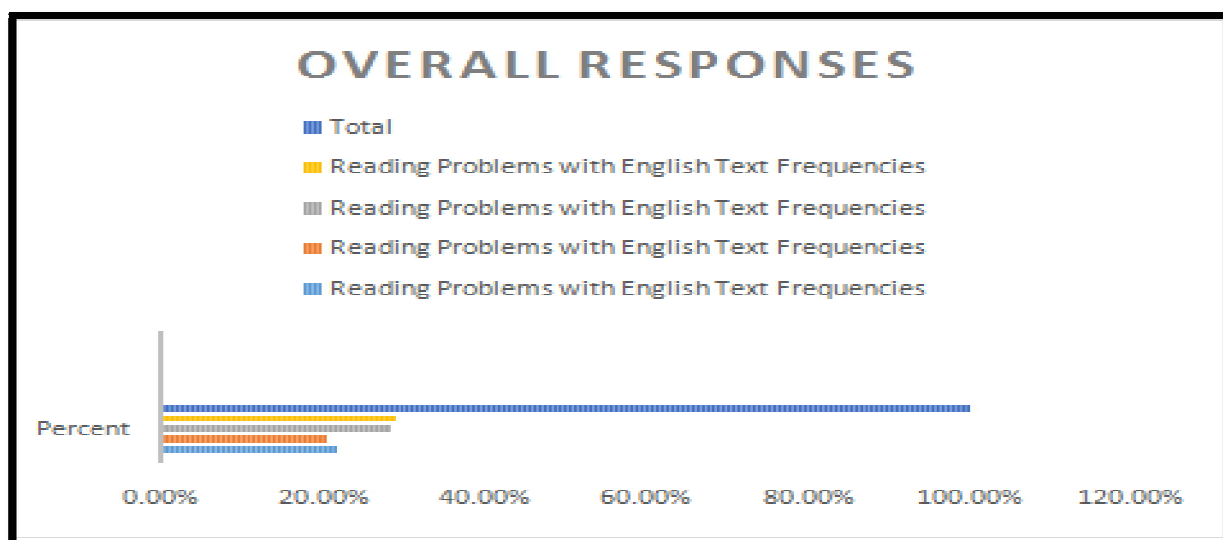


Figure 2

7. Recommendations

Mainly, this study was for the findings of actual reading problems faced by the master level Saudi students and for improvement of these pointed out weak areas. This recommendation is also the answer of research question number four. Indeed, additional research to further increase the students' understanding of vocabulary learning is recommended. In vocabulary, problem glossing is found as a useful technique in many research studies for enhancing reading ability of the students (Davis, 1989; Rott et al., 2002; Watanabe, 1997). Also, the publishers should introduce supplements or bilingual glossaries which should be in English as well as Arabic and that will help these master level students than the currently used learning material which doesn't have this type of reading help.

As far as the reading text is concerned, there should be matching text when the learning material is selected. The most important fact is that the text material should be chosen as per level of the students and should not go higher level. Moreover, the text should be at a level of the profession, e.g. the current study was on master level students of Agricultural field so they should have been given learning material related to their field so that students could make most efficient use of such learning material for the best reading text comprehension.

The academic inference of the above data analysis results for reading comprehension text difficulties is that reading aloud by the student was weak if it is made a regular and integral part of the EFL teaching and learning process, can have a positive effect. Any planned reading aloud by the instructors for these master level students can produce good text comprehension. Moreover, learners should be intentionally aware of the objective of reading aloud (Flesher, B. 1988). There is also a need for more research in this area with these master level students by using different types of text from the learning material in their relevant field of agricultural sciences. In addition, to make text easy for these master level students to understand among different, there should be a choice of the linguistics knowledge because EFL vocabulary makes reading comprehension easy for master level students (Shiotsu and Weir, 2007). The second recommendation is the use of lexical knowledge for these master level Saudi students, because it explains reading comprehension which makes the text easy at their level as reported by Mecartty (2000) for postgraduate students.

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